

# Elevating your Organisational Effectiveness: A Guide for CBOs

By Charles Kojo Vandyck



CORONA  
STRATEGY

A hand-drawn illustration on a textured, light grey background. The word 'CORONA' is written in a large, bold, hand-drawn font. Below it, the word 'STRATEGY' is also written in a similar hand-drawn font. A thick, hand-drawn arrow points from the right side of 'STRATEGY' towards the top right corner of the page.

## AUTHOR



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The West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) was created by the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) to reinforce the institutional and operational capacities of civil society in the region. WACSI also serves as a resource centre for training, research and documentation, experience sharing and political dialogue for CSOs in West Africa.

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WACSeries are analytical periodic write-ups on topical themes and issues relevant to West Africa. These write-ups provide experts, researchers and practitioners a space to reflect, analyse and posit views and recommendations on emerging issues and debates.

The WACSeries Op-Eds are thought provoking and intellectually engaging write-ups that provide critical reflections and analysis of issues relevant to civil society and development in West Africa.

### Objectives of WACSERIES

- To raise awareness on key issues in West Africa;
- To generate debates and discussions on these issues;
- To proffer recommendations on civil society involvement in advocacy;
- To provide recommendations to policy makers.



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## Introduction

The outbreak of the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic has presented unprecedented challenges to the organisational health of community-based organisations (CBOs) especially in the global south. CBOs are important public health system stakeholders as they provide numerous, often highly valued COVID-19 response services to the members of their communities. The Coronavirus pandemic has broadened and increased the complexities related to the operations and strategic focus for most CBOs. Therefore, concerns about CBOs' capacity for sustainability have become essential as it has significant implications for achieving the sustainable development goals.

This opinion piece will focus on the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic and shifting donor priorities on the state of the civil society sector in today's "corona" socio-economic context and what it means to leaders of CBOs in creating long-term viability.

This piece would also focus on realistic strategies to implement a long-term sustainability plan within a crisis and how to sustain its outcomes beyond the crisis.

Within the month of March and April 2020, I received numerous requests from CBOs seeking advice about how they can adjust their strategies and diversify their funding streams to respond to the challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Their main concern was how they could ensure their organisations become sustainable in the long-term since their funding streams are deeply being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Therefore, I decided to respond to these important requests through this opinion piece. The thrust of this piece is on adjusting a long-term strategic plan to overcome a crisis and the importance of refining your organisational structure and ways of working.





## 1- THE TIME FOR AN ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGY IS NOW!

If your organisation does not have a strategic plan, this would be the best time to consider thinking about developing a plan that will provide a guide for your organisation in the next 3-5 years. It is now or never, failure to do so will certainly have a negative effect on the survivability of your organisation. A strategic plan will serve as an essential roadmap which will help you to navigate an uncertain future. Unfortunately, there is a misconception that strategic planning is a heavy thinking process that does not produce any actionable and immediate tangible results. This misconception needs to change as the pandemic has provided a scenario where thinking and acting intentionally must become a norm and not an exception.

### 1.1 Realign your vision and mission

Another important action is to reflect on the relevance of your organisation's vision. The following questions can help guide the reflection process; (1) Where do you see your organisation in the future? (2) Where do you want your organisation to be 3-5 years from now? This would enable you develop a model for your or-

ganisation that would quickly respond to the current turbulent context and assess whether it fits into its future direction.

A critical component of strategic planning within a crisis is for you to be clear about whether your organisation's mission is still relevant. The following questions should be further interrogated (1) Is your organisation's mandate still relevant? (2) Does your organisation's target audience still need your support? (3) How should your organisation engage and influence its audience in these difficult times? (4) Is there a need for your organisation to change its structure and ways of working?

Clarity about these pertinent issues is important not only for internal governance and effective leadership but it enables you to communicate what the organisation is doing to overcome the constraints the crisis presents to potential funders both international and domestic, stakeholders, board members and staff.

The process of reviewing, refining, and defining your vision and mission, helps your organisation to make better decisions about the programmes and services it would provide within the crisis and in the future. For example, if there is a scenario where your organisation is in the process of winning a grant that would potentially add new programmes and services. However, the grant is not providing any operational expenses to implement these programmes but only programmatic funds, your organisation would have to assess whether the programmes fit with its mission, especially in these uncertain times. The leadership of the organisation may decide that the grant is not the best fit for them within the current context.

From my experience, one of the biggest challenges CBOs will face is the temptation to chase the "dollar" even if it does not align with the organisation's mandate in order to survive these turbulent times. However, it is imperative that within crisis periods, CBOs do not get distracted by pursuing objectives that are not in their niche or are not mission critical.



## 1.2 Conduct an honest organisational self-assessment

A key challenge many organisations will face is their failure to internally have conversations and reflections about their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) as they develop their crisis response plans. The purpose of the SWOT analysis is to help an organisation understand its current state and position. A SWOT analysis would enable an organisation to determine where the gaps are.

## 1.3 Develop a feasible roadmap

Therefore, the ability and capacity of an organisation to excel within this crisis period is largely contingent on the reflections and strategic actions that will be taken, taking into consideration the following guidelines:

- **Vision**- where are you going?
- **Mission**- who are you?
- **Values**- what are your guiding principles?
- **Goals**- what are your organisation's high-level strategic objectives?
- **Objectives**- what are the specific strategies that need to be implemented to achieve your organisation's goals?
- **Tactics**- what specific actions need to be taken to achieve your organisation's objectives within the crisis period and post-crisis?

## 2- DOES YOUR CBO HAVE A SUITABLE ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE?

The second essential action is the importance of clearly redefining your organisational structure and ways of working. Redefining your organisational structure and ways of working should be done purposefully and periodically. As the Coronavirus has exposed the possibility of working remotely and within physical distancing protocols, it is important for organisations to explore the possibility of retaining remote working options in their organisational modus operandi, hence, the need to define a structure that suitably accommodates this new operational dynamic without any ambiguities.

The way you structure your CBO to respond to a crisis including who reports to whom, and who has the power to make decisions can affect its efficiency and morale. A structure that does not make it clear where the authority lies can leave staff members confused about whom to turn to for direction and authorization.

It is important that an organisation should periodically take a critical look at its structure especially how it should work and engage with its internal and external stakeholders. This becomes even more essential during crisis periods, hence the COVID-19 pandemic affords an opportunity for CBOs to assess the relevance and efficacy of their current structures. This exercise may necessitate a complete overhaul of the current structure, or, simple vital adjustments to have the requisite structure that permits the organisation to respond to the crisis while repositioning itself to emerge stronger, better and possibly bigger. If this is not done deliberately, the organisation could face complex operational challenges including funding and staffing shortfalls.

An organisation must determine whether it has the staff and volunteers it needs to fulfill its objectives and effectively respond to the challenges the crisis presents. An essential aspect of refining your organisational structure would be also to assess whether certain operational functions can be outsourced. For example, functions that can be outsourced could be communications, social media and traditional media engagement. An organisation must determine whether it must undertake all these functions by itself or it could hire resource persons or partner sister organisations to execute these functions.

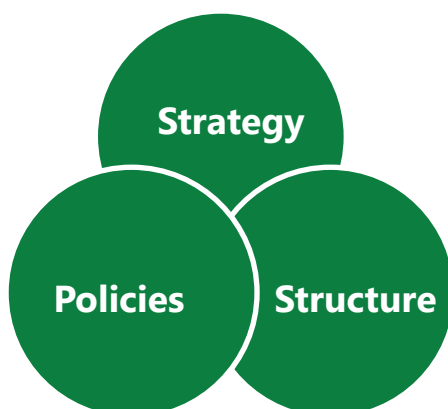
Organisations should also think through how effectively they could use volunteers in comparison to paid staff, especially in these difficult times. Sometimes, there is short to medium term activities volunteers could undertake instead of paid staff especially within a crisis context. It is essential for organisations to target skilled volunteers that can remotely help to deliver on aspects of projects and programmes that an organisation may not have available competence or may be costly to hire a full-time staff. This could help reduce human resource costs without sacrificing qualitative results.



### 3- DOES THE ORGANISATION HAVE THE RIGHT POLICIES?

Additionally, organisations should constantly evaluate their staff welfare and performance management strategies. If you do not have a formalised organisational structure, a staff welfare policy and a performance management system in place, it is imperative to have a mechanism that allows the organisation to respond effectively and timely to the welfare needs and performance of your staff.

Fig. 1:



The organisational effectiveness bubble (Vandyck, 2020)

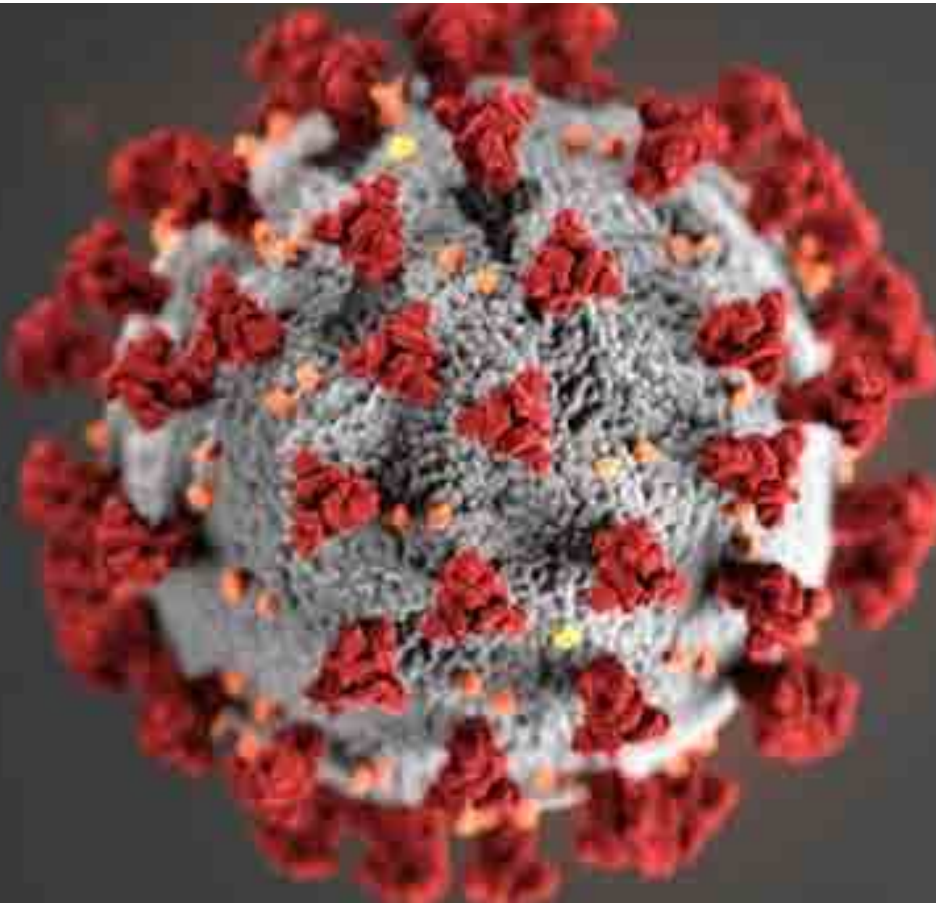
The seamless nature of the circumference of each of the circles represents the robustness of each of these components in the organisation; the strategy, the appropriate policies and the organisational structure. The overlapping nature of the bubbles also highlights how strategy, policies and structure influence each other and the need for coherence as they are developed and practiced. Organisations that can maintain a smooth and well-rounded structure, policies and strategy will be more capable of surviving during and post crisis as opposed to organisations that demonstrate deflations or cracks in their strategy, structure and policy bubbles.

### 4- MINIMISE THE RESOURCE BURDEN ON THE ORGANISATION

An organisation could also consider sharing resources with other organisations. For example, you may be in a building with two other CBOs and may decide to share a front desk professional who can answer phone calls and receive visitors for the three different organisations. This could help your organisation become more cost effective and prudent.

Another important approach is to promote cross training to ensure that whatever is learned by a staff member is transferred and institutionalised within your organisation. This prevents a situation where essential learning is not transferred because a staff member exits.

A golden opportunity COVID-19 has presented to civil society organisations, including CBOs, is the invaluable and indispensable role of technology to catalyse operational effectiveness. How your organisation will seize this opportunity to integrate technology adoption and usage into the organisational culture and practices will determine how well the organisation will be (1) effective in times of crisis, (2) be more effective post-crisis, and (3) be relevant in responding to its mission during and post the crisis. Therefore, it is important for CBOs to consider technology to be an essential tool for their organisation's growth and influence moving forward.



## CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented unavoidable impact on the operations and influence of CBOs. Therefore, strategic planning adjustments and adaptation must be understood and practiced by CBOs as critical elements of crisis response management and long-term viability.

CBOs are being challenged to be proactive in their overall approach including to further strengthen their internal governance and leadership through adaptation and strategic actions.

To deepen their engagements with communities especially in these uncertain times, they will need to:

- Develop and integrate strategic thinking and planning within operations including reflection sessions on vision and mandates.
- Ensure that the organisational structure and policies are strengthened and adjusted to enable CBOs to effectively respond to the crisis and future challenges.
- Put measures in place to minimise CBOs resourcing needs and develop roadmaps towards organisational sustainability.



Tips for better community engagement



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